



Copper Mountain College Health Sciences/Nursing Programs Department

HEPATITIS B VACCINE Questions and Answers

1. What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus which causes inflammation of the liver. Approximately 5% to 50% of people with Hepatitis B become chronic carriers of the virus and 1% to 2% will die of fulminate hepatitis. Those who are chronic carriers of the virus may go on to develop more serious liver damage and even liver failure.

2. How do you catch Hepatitis B?

For the most part, Hepatitis B develops from exposure to blood products such as with contaminated needle stick. The virus may also be present in other bodily fluids. Thus, the disease can also be transmitted via close interpersonal contact (including sexual contact) with those who carry the Hepatitis B virus.

3. Who needs the Hepatitis B vaccine?

People who are at high risk for exposure to the virus. The list includes healthcare workers who are exposed to blood products. We recommend that the following high risk groups receive the Hepatitis B vaccine:

- Nurses (and health sciences students who have contact with patients)
- Physicians
- Environmental services workers
- Laboratory personnel
- Emergency room staff
- Phlebotomists
- Dialysis unit staff
- Operating room technicians
- Decontamination personnel
- Security personnel

These are the individuals who must often suffer needle stick accidents. Accidents are unpredictable.

4. What is the Hepatitis B vaccine?

Engerix-B is a noninfectious, recombinant DNA Hepatitis B vaccine. The vaccine contains purified surface antigen of the Hepatitis B virus obtained by culturing genetically engineered cells which carry the surface antigen. It does not contain any human blood products. It is highly effective in preventing Hepatitis B in those at risk of developing infection.

5. How does the Hepatitis B vaccine work?

The vaccine stimulates the body's immune system to produce antibodies which will fight off Hepatitis B infection.

6. How is the vaccine given?

It is given in a series of three shots (0, 1 and 6 months). A follow up blood draw is done one month after the last shot to test for antibody production.

7. Does the vaccine help if you have already been exposed to Hepatitis B (e.g. after a needle stick)?

The vaccine may offer some protection after exposure, but not nearly as good as getting the vaccine before exposure.

8. Are there any contraindications?

The only contraindications are sensitivity to yeast or a previous reaction to the vaccine. It is not known whether the vaccine can cause fetal harm, therefore it should be given to a pregnant women only if clearly needed. It should also be used with caution in nursing mothers as it is not known whether it is excreted in human milk.

9. What are the side effects of the vaccine?

The vaccine is generally well tolerated. During clinical studies involving over 10,000 individuals distributed over all age groups, no serious adverse reactions attributable to the vaccine were reported. One percent to 10% of the injections are associated with the following:

- Redness and swelling at the injection site
- Fever
- Headache
- Dizziness

***Don't wait until after you have had
a needle stick accident to get the hepatitis B vaccine!***

Act Now!